

Five Before Five

Hadith Reflections Series



Youth before old age



Health before sickness



Wealth before poverty



Life before death



Free time before you're occupied

Idris Salik

Five Before Five

“Take benefit of five before five: Your youth before our old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you are preoccupied, and your life before your death.” (Al-Hakim)

- Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

In this book, Idris Salik provides some brief reflections on a hadith of the beloved messenger (ﷺ). His commentary unpacks the universal themes contained within this hadith and how we can derive benefit from them.

The Goodly Word Books hadith series are part of an endeavour by the publisher to provide reflections and commentaries on select hadith. We strive to present these hadith with the primary intention of improving the health and wellbeing of Muslims.

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FIVE
BEFORE
FIVE

Hadith Reflections Series

IDRIS SALIK



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اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَوَسِّلِهِ

Dedication

All praise is due to Allah. May His peace and blessings be on Muhammad, his family and his companions.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

"Seest thou not how Allah sets forth a parable? - A goodly word like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches reach to the heavens, of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition".

- (Quran, 14:24)



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- (ﷺ) This symbol indicates salutations on the Prophet Muhammad where we say “peace be upon him”. When the name of Prophet Muhammad is mentioned or written, a Muslim is to respect him and invoke this statement of peace upon him.
- (ra) Radeyallāhu ‘Anhu (Arabic: “رضي الله عنه”)
Translation: May Allāh be pleased with him
(anha for female).
- (as) These two letters mean “Alayhi Salam” (Arabic: “عليه السلام”) which means “May Allah (God) bless him” in English.

INTRODUCTION

“Take advantage of five before five: Your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you are occupied, and your life before your death.”

- Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

The hadith this little book is based on should be a mantra for every believer. More than any other time in history, the world we live in today is full of infinite distractions. The technological revolution of the last fifty years has irrevocably altered all of our lives, encroaching upon that most sacred of things: our time.

Social media, endless news cycles and limitless entertainment is making it increasingly difficult for us to remember God. There is no doubt that we are witnessing a mass and frightful enchantment with technology. As the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Chris Hedges rightfully remarked in an interview with the Muslim scholar Hamza Yusuf, that it is time we “shut off these electronic hallucinations” or at least moderate their use.

The technological take over of our age should concern us all as believers since it promotes a pernicious state of *ghafla*, or heedlessness, on a scale hitherto unseen before. The Quran anticipates this state of humankind when it declares: *“Surely most people are heedless of Our signs”* (Quran, 10:92). When one is heedless, one is easily led astray. It is said that the origins of an individual’s sinful act can be traced to their initial state of *ghafla*. Thus, it is the remembrance of Allah which safeguards from being led astray.

Studies on depression have demonstrated repeatedly that the amount of time a person spends in front of their computer and mobile screens - particularly on social media

platforms - correlates with the extent of their depression. There was even an increased likelihood of a person developing depression where there previously was none.

Big tech companies have made it clear that what they desire above all us is our attention. Today, it is the commodification of human attention that brings tremendous financial gain, something referred to as "The Attention Economy". In the Attention Economy it is we humans who are the products, lured first into sharing ourselves virtually and then having these details pinged through the digital highway. As the ever sophisticated algorithms cater to our deepest desires, we give up more and more of our flitting attention and more of our time. In essence, we are giving away our freedom and ultimately our lives. We have gone from being *homo sapiens* (Latin, literally 'wise man') to *homo distractus*.

This has presented our generation with immense ethical and moral challenges. For example, the impact of such technologies on our children and the vulnerable in our societies. It has even prompted the founders of such technologies to launch a digital well-being initiative alerting us to the excesses of such technologies, which they admit can severely impair one's quality of life.

All of this has intensified the human propensity towards heedlessness with harmful affects on our spiritual lives. *Ghafla* is a spiritual distancing from God. It is the hijacking of our consciousness through distraction. When we remember Allah, He remembers us but when we forget Him, He disregards us. As the Quran clearly tells us: "*Therefore remember Me, I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and reject not Me*" (Quran, 2:152). It is in forgetting God that our hearts, minds and souls feel uneasy since "*Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest*" (Quran, 13:28). In a hadith narrated in At-Tirmidhi the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us that "Allah does not answer a supplication that comes from a

heedless heart". This is because the spiritual life is one which demands a presence of mind, a mind free from distraction. Only then can the soul experience the bliss and contentment it naturally desires.

Time is the spiritual currency of the believer. All things happen through time. Yet for many of us, time is nothing less than a mirage until we clearly see the dwindling flame of our own lives. For some, the flame of life burns out before they reach tender old age. Islam is clear that our time on earth is but a brief one and that each one of us will have to face God and plead our case before Him. As the Quran tells us, "*He (Allah) will not be questioned as to that which He doeth, but they will be questioned*" (Quran, 21:23).

As human beings endowed with the faculty of intelligence, we will undoubtedly have a thousand questions about how we should live our lives. Questions concerning the "good life" or a "life lived well" have been ones which philosophers, saints and prophets have been grappling with for thousands of years. Such questions speak to a deep and perennial yearning to live the life of dignified moral beings.

Being distracted from God or a higher calling is nothing new and there have always been individuals and forces in the world bent on capturing the holy grail of human attention. In the Quran, Iblis vows to "*adorn the path of error for them (humankind) in the earth, and shall mislead them every one*" (Quran, 15:39).

In ancient Greece, Socrates challenged the sophistry of his age by exposing the spurious rhetoric used by the intelligentsia of his time. He accused them of manipulating language as a way of avoiding and distracting others from moral responsibility. For Socrates, so long as human beings had the capacity for self-knowledge, they had the ability to become virtuous. Once a person acknowledged a thing as virtuous, they were obligated to act and manifest that virtue in the world.

Furthermore, the pursuit of happiness, or "the good life", could not be divorced from the pursuit of virtue.

Divine revelation is intended to remedy the void of purposelessness that so many people experience today. An individual who has no purpose is akin to a ship without a rudder, left adrift in the vast ocean of existence. If we all agree as humans that we should try to live as good and virtuous a life as we possibly can, then the question that follows is what this looks like in practice. This is where God's guidance comes to our aid by providing us with an example through the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his sunnah. The Quran proclaims, "And most surely you (O Muhammad) have sublime morals" (Quran, 67:4). The presence of the Prophet (ﷺ) is nothing less than a grace from God which is why he is described as "a mercy for all of humankind" (Quran, 21:107).

The word sunnah in the Arabic language means "habitual practice" or a "way of life". Although we can have belief without action, action is a manifestation of belief and serves to strengthen it. The Quran promises us that virtuous actions will bear fruit in this life and in the Hereafter: "Surely those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, there awaits them Gardens of Bliss" (Quran, 31:8).

In this small treatise I present some humble reflections on the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ). The five pearls of wisdom contained in this hadith have always had an enduring universality for me personally. If we would only ponder on them for a while, we could derive such practical benefit from it in our daily lives and escape from a state of *ghafla* (heedlessness) to a state of *dhikr* (remembrance). Even if it is for a moment.

Any errors are my own, any benefit is from Allah.

Idris Salik
London, 2021



Youth before old age

1. Youth Before Old Age

Youth is a gift from Allah. The vitality and curiosity that comes with being young is an exhilarating feeling. It is your youthful self that is called to adventure and self-discovery. The memories of your youth will be deposited to your old age and it is these memories which you will meditate over in your senior years. The memories of a youth well-spent will be a source of great peace and joy in old age. Similarly, a memory of a wasted youth will be a source of sorrow, regret and resentment.

Always connect your present youthful self to an older future self. The twenty-five year old you will make decisions that will affect the thirty-five year old you, and the thirty-five year old you will make decisions that will affect the forty-five year old you, and so on and so on.

Your youth is a tumultuous and testing time. You are a person-in-the-making. When adolescence approaches, it grabs you by the hand and forces you into the world. It is a call to establish your identity and your voice.

Just as your youth will be filled with wonder and limitless curiosity, it will also abound with endless distractions. Therefore, it is important to exercise focus and cultivate conscientious habits. Concentration, hard work and being aware of the responsibilities in the horizon of your adulthood will ease your passage into old age. As one gets older, life sets you on a firm course filled with ever expanding responsibilities, the main three being work, marriage and children.

Islam recognises the difficulties of youth and this is the reason the Prophet (ﷺ) said that *"a young person who grew up worshipping Allah, will be among the seven who are granted shade by Allah when there no shade but His"* (Bukhari). Worshipping Allah when one is old and nearing

death is far easier than worshipping Allah in the prime of one's youth. Taking advantage of your youth entails three things: acquiring knowledge, cultivating virtue and acting in the world with one eye on your present and one eye on your future.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said that *"Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim"* (Ibn Majah). This is especially true when young since the mind is at its most curious, fertile, and is ever-ready to absorb information. This knowledge is not exclusive to religious knowledge and encompasses worldly knowledge too.

Knowledge of the deen is intended to orient your morals and principles as you make your way through this confusing world. Self-knowledge is the most fundamental aspect of knowledge you can acquire in the world. Everything you do in the world will be guided by the thoughts and perceptions of yourself. Self-knowledge means that we come to know our thoughts and our habits and rectify any faults therein through the science of self-purification (*Tazkiyyah Al-Nafs*). In your youth you should learn to pray, learn to recite the Quran in the Arabic language, and have a basic grasp of the history of Islam, especially the life of our beloved Prophet (ﷺ) and his pious successors.

Knowledge of the world should be knowledge of the workings of the world. This includes becoming knowledgeable and skilled with a subject or craft so that you can earn a lawful living and bear your responsibilities in relation to yourself and your family. When the Prophet (ﷺ) was asked, *"What is the best earning?"* he said, *"It is an honest sale or a man's work with his hands."* (Musnad Ahmad). A large part of your youth will be dedicated to figuring out what you want to do with your life. Pay this the serious attention it deserves and be scrupulous in finding a vocation that aligns with your personality and talents. Again, discovering who you are and what you are, what you believe in and what you are good at is an indispensable part of

self-knowledge. Life will constantly reveal yourself to you. Always remember to align your morals with your vocation by taking yourself to account. If you do not take accountability, remember that Allah will.

Those who strive to cultivate virtue when young will have this translated into wisdom as they become older. To be virtuous means to be spiritually and morally steadfast in the world. The Prophet (ﷺ) said *"Whoever grows even a single strand of white hair in the path of Allah, will find it a source of light for him on the day of Qiyamah"* (At-Tirmidhi). Virtue is the fruit of knowledge and belief translated into action. Knowledge and action must complement each another. As Allah says in the Quran, *"For those who believe and work righteous deeds, there will be Gardens of Bliss"* (Quran, 31:8) and *"... Say: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition'"* (Quran, 39:9). Virtue is the enactment of your highest moral and spiritual ideals which is attained through deep self-reflection and the daily exercising of good habits.

The habits you develop in your youth will come to define you as a person. You are defined by your habits. Islam places great emphasis on the concept of good character (*akhlaq*) and your character is nothing less than an assemblage of your habits. The Prophet (ﷺ) said *"I have been sent to perfect good character."* (Al-Muwatta). Good character is not something we achieve quickly. It is a long-drawn-out set of daily habits that patiently come to shape you as a person over a period of years, decades and even a lifetime. *Akhlaq* encompasses the idea of adab or good manners in relation to oneself and in relation to others.

When we are young, we are in the process of refining our character and the only way to do this is through practice. The

more we practise virtues such as kindness, generosity, honouring our guests, maintaining the bonds of kinship and frugality while we are young, the more likely it will be an enduring part of our character. In the end, it is the way we have conducted ourselves in the world which will be our legacy.

Beware of bad manners and ego overtaking you on account of your youthful heedlessness. In his *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Imam Bukhari narrates a hadith from the Prophet (ﷺ) in which he says "*The most evil in my nation are garrulous, braggarts, and pompous. The best of my nation are those with the best character.*" This is timely advice for our own age of rampant narcissism facilitated by social media. Today, narcissism is a profitable business. However, since this technology is still relatively new and keeps on developing at an exponential rate, we have yet to account for the psychological impact it is having on us as a species, especially on the minds of our youth who are constantly at the coalface of this rapidly evolving technology.

If you continue to unreflectively engage in bad manners, then this will come to entrap you into a character that is detested by others without your knowledge. To know the difference between good and bad manners requires us to be self-aware and considerate of others. In relation to others, it is always good to follow The Golden Rule where it is written: "So in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you..." (Matthew 7:12).

A great deal of our consumer culture is obsessed with youthfulness. Advertisers bombard us with commercials containing anti-aging creams and plastic surgery, which only create the outward appearance of youthfulness. They also instil within us an unhealthy desire to continue with the lifestyles of youthfulness despite our ailing bodies and

minds.

We are witnessing the canonization of youth. Our society worships at the altar of youth by engaging in endless rituals of youthfulness. However, what propels this desire of ours as a culture to stay forever young is fear, namely the fear of becoming incapacitated in old age and the fear of death.

Old age is an inevitability for us all. In a hadith tradition narrated in Abu Dawud, the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us to, "*Seek medical treatment, for Allah has not created any disease but He has also created a remedy for it, except for one disease: Old age*".

Our attempts to deny old age is an unhealthy one creating a psychological dissonance. In 1983, the psychoanalyst Dr. Dan Kelly published his famous book *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up*. In it he made the argument that individuals who fail to grow up and bear the burdens that come with adulthood suffer from a psychological illness known as "Peter Pan Syndrome" based on the popular fairy tale of a boy who refuses to grow up and spends his time in the fictional world of Neverland. Such men, (and women) avoid responsibility, commitment and enter an unwinnable battle against the aging self. This delusional state only tends to exacerbate our anxieties while we are alive. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*The son of Adam grows old, but two things remain young in him: 1) Desire for wealth, and 2) Desire for a (longer) life*" (Bukhari).

Although old age is a state of physical decrepitude, in Islam it is an honourable state. We are encouraged to be accepting of old age since battling against the inevitable only fills one with more unnecessary anxiety. One day, the Prophet (ﷺ) said to Abdullah ibn al-'As, "*Do not pluck out grey hair. If any believer grows a grey hair in Islam, he will have light on the Day of Resurrection*" (Abu Dawud).

There are countless hadith which remind us to honour

and respect the elderly. The Prophet (ﷺ) *"Those who do not show mercy to our young ones and do not realise the right of our elders are not from us"* (Abu Dawud). In the Quran, Allah tells us, *"Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word"* (Quran, 17:23).



Health before sickness

2. Health Before Sickness

Many of us take our health for granted. Our bodies are the vessels through which we experience the world. Yet we humans abuse our bodies by loading it with things we know to be unhealthy. Allah tells us in the Quran, *"Eat of the good things which We have provided for you"* (Quran, 2:172). The Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"Whosoever begins the day feeling family security and good health; and possessing provision for his day, it is as though he possessed the whole world."* (At-Tirmidhi).

Our body is the vessel through which we manifest our being in the world. If it fails, then our ability to live a wholesome existence is greatly affected. In the Islamic worldview, our bodies are a gift from Allah and its preservation is an act of gratitude towards Him. Allah tells us in the Quran, *"We have indeed created man in the best of moulds"* (Quran, 95:4).

We must become aware of our body. We neglect it at our own peril. The way we treat our bodies ultimately comes to affect the way we carry ourselves in the world. We must get to know our bodies since each of us has various dislikes and likes. Your body may be allergic to certain foods or reacts differently to cold or hot weather. There is a tendency for us to separate our body from our minds. However, modern science is constantly alerting us to the way our body affects our mental and emotional state. For example, we know exercise and a good diet are not only physically good for us but also emotionally good for us too.

This symbiotic relationship between mind and body is something which Islam and other great world religions recognised a long time ago. Islam is an embodied faith consisting of not only a belief but a set of physical rituals and practices designed to regulate our day to day lives so that we

may reap the benefits spiritually.

We know that our body is an *amanah* (trust) from Allah and on the day of judgement, our body will give evidence against us as to the actions we committed. In Surah Yaseen, Allah tells us, *"This day We will set a seal on their mouths, and their hands will speak out to Us and their feet will bear witness to their deeds."* (Quran, 36:65) and in Surah Nur, we read: *"On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet will testify against them, regarding what they used to do."* (Quran, 24:24).

The German philosopher Nietzsche wrote in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that "there is more wisdom in your body than there is in your deepest philosophy". In other words, our body has just as much to teach us as a sophisticated philosophical tract. The material world is constantly being filtered through our bodily senses of touch, taste, sight, sound and smell.

Many people persist in habits which they know to be bad for their bodies. This is the battle between one's 'aql (intellect) and one's *shahawaat* (desires). Take the human problem of addiction as an example. In 2015, the first world audit of addiction was carried out by a team of social scientists based in Australia. They found that about 240 million people around the world are dependent on alcohol, more than a billion people smoke, and about 15 million people inject drugs, such as heroin, into their bodies.

Modern psychologists tell us that addiction is a complicated affair since it is not only an ailment of the body but also of the mind. Wikipedia describes addiction as "a biopsychosocial disorder characterized by repeated use of drugs, or repetitive engagement in a behavior such as gambling, despite harm to self and others".

The unbridled use of harmful substances or excessive habits are a sign of something deeper at play in one's psyche.

We know this because although people are aware of the negative health outcomes of certain habits, they nevertheless persist in engaging in such habits. They sacrifice long-term health for short-term pleasure.

One of the main reasons people develop addictive habits is because they wish to numb themselves from the painful reality of their own lives. They are overwhelmed by the burden of being human and the challenges this brings with it. The Prophet (ﷺ) summed this up eloquently in a hadith in which he stated, *"Paradise is surrounded by hardships and the Hell is surrounded by temptations."* (Muslim).

We must also bear in mind that sickness or disease is also one of the tests we will all endure during the course of our lives. We will witness a loved one struck down with sickness or we will ourselves be struck down by sickness or disease. Even the best of creation was not exempt from such trials. In Sahih Al-Bukhari, Samura ibn Jundab (ra) tells us that once "The Prophet (ﷺ) became sick and did not wake up for Tahajjud prayer for a night or two." Aisha (ra) tells us that "I never saw anybody suffering so much from sickness as Allah's Messenger" (ﷺ). In the final days of his life, it said that Fatima (ra), the daughter of the Prophet (ﷺ), entered upon her father while he was in great pain. She cried out "What great pain my father is in!" to which he (ﷺ) replied, *"He will not suffer any more when today is over"* (Bukhari).

In Islam, we are told that sickness is a blessed state since all disease and sickness is but a trial from Allah. Aisha (ra) tells us that she heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying, *"No calamity befalls a Muslim but that Allah expiates some of his sins because of it, even though it were the prick he receives from a thorn."* (Bukhari). Once the Prophet (ﷺ) went to visit a woman who was sick with a raging fever. When the Prophet (ﷺ) asked her what the problem was, she replied, "I have a severe fever. May Allah curse it!" Upon hearing this he said,

"Do not curse the fever, for verily it forgives sins like a furnace ridding the impurities in iron" (Muslim).

Such blessings brought about by suffering through sickness is not something which is reserved for the afterlife. Even in this life we can see the blessing of sickness if we only take a closer look. When someone falls sick, we see well-wishers coming to visit them. We see family and friends coming together to ease - in whatever way they can - the sickness the person is suffering from. We know that visiting the sick (*ziyara al-marid*) is one of the loftiest deeds one can perform in Islam. The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasised this in a powerful hadith qudsi in which he said, *"On the Day of Resurrection, God the Mighty and Majestic will say: 'O Child of Adam! I became sick and you did not visit me!' The person will say, 'O Lord, how can I visit you and you are the Lord of all that Exists!' God will say, 'Did you not know that my slave 'so and so' became sick, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you visited him, you would have found me with him?'"* (Muslim). In another hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us, *"When you enter upon one who is sick, cheer them up and give them hope of a long life, for that does not change anything (of the Divine Decree), but it will cheer the heart of the one who is sick."* (Ibn Majah).

Whatever your lot of sickness and health may come to be during your lifetime, you must take advantage of the healthy days of your life and bear with patience those days where you feel unwell. Today, this includes both physical and mental sickness, which we are witnessing on an unprecedented scale.

There is much evidence now to suggest that our physical health is intimately bound to our emotional self. If we are unwell or troubled emotionally or psychologically, we can also make ourselves sick physically, a phenomenon popularly known in the medical literature as psychosomatic.

Muslim physicians were some of the first to pick up on this idea and wrote extensively about the relationship between one's emotional or mental state and one's physical health.

It is universally acknowledged now that regular exercise is an effective antidepressant. Today, physicians often advise their patients to take up sporting activities of various kinds or encourage them to join the gym. Even light exercise in the comfort of one's home can have profound benefits for the person suffering from stress, anxiety or clinical depression. Exercise done communally has also been shown to benefit one's mental health, perhaps owing to the added social dynamic. Thus, many people opt to join cycling, rowing or running clubs in their local towns.

Although mental health seems to be an increasingly widespread problem today, it has always been a part of the human experience. In his *Akhlaq wa as-Sir*, the Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm writes, "I searched for a common goal amongst humankind, to which all would agree to strive for excellence. I have not found anything other than the vanquishing of anxiety [*hamm*]." Ibn Hazm went on to say that it was vital that we constantly reminded ourselves of the transient nature of this world with all our aspirations and ambitions. One should not beat themselves down everytime something does not go their way but should take it in their stride by reminding themselves that this life is not their final destination.

Today, we would do well to heed Ibn Hazm's advice since alot of anxiety and depression stems from our feelings of inadequacy in relation to the dunya rather than the akhira (hereafter). God is far more forgiving and far more compassionate towards his slaves than the dunya is. As the American Muslim scholar Hamza Yusuf said once that this world is designed to break your heart. So, take care not to strive after the dunya to such a degree that you make yourself sick by

forgetting your meeting with your Creator.

Good health is a theme which runs through the Islamic tradition and we can even go so far as to say that a healthy body gains innumerable spiritual benefits. We all know of the Prophet's (ﷺ) saying that a physically strong believer is better than a physically weak believer. In the hadith literature we find numerous injunctions to eat healthily and exercise. The Prophet (ﷺ) told parents that they should teach children activities such as swimming, archery and even horse riding. In Sahih Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us that *"Any action without the remembrance of Allah is either a diversion or heedlessness except four acts: walking from target to target during archery practice, training a horse, and learning to swim"* (At-Tabarani).

So, take care of your physical health as best as you can before you become sick or senile.



Wealth before poverty

3. Wealth before Poverty

As human beings navigating the dunya, one of the greatest trials we will face is wealth. In Islam, money is not considered the root of all evil but rather the way we use our wealth can become a source of evil in our lives. Our wealth is therefore a blessing but also a test for us. Allah says in the Quran, *"But the Messenger and the believers with him strived with their wealth and their lives. They will have all the best, and it is they who will be successful"* (Quran, 9:88).

It matters not whether one is born into wealth or not. What matters is how one uses their wealth during their time in the dunya. The condition of being rich and poor vacillates according to divine decree. This is why it is important to spend in the way of Allah when one has the ability to do so.

Money is tied to the Islamic concept of *rizq*. *Rizq* is an expansive term in Islam encompassing wealth, family ties, spirituality, faith, intellect, health and everything else that is beneficial. Thus, our wealth cannot be separated from our faith since the two go hand in hand. This is because how one spends one's *rizq* is a potential manifestation of one's faith. This can be seen in the example of the Prophet's (ﷺ) noble and trusted companion Abu Bakr (ra). Once, the Prophet (ﷺ) was sitting with his companions and he said "The wealth of none of you has benefited me as much as the wealth of Abu Bakr." Abu Bakr wept and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I and my wealth are only for you, O Messenger of Allah'. (Musnad Ahmed).

Abu Bakr (ra) was renowned for giving away his wealth, as were many of the companions. They understood that the way they used their wealth had a great

bearing on their faith. On another occasion, a man said to the Prophet (ﷺ), "O Messenger of Allah! By Allah! Indeed I love you!" So he said: 'Consider what you say.' He said: 'By Allah! I indeed love you!' Three times. He said: 'If you do love me, then prepare and arm yourself against poverty. For indeed poverty comes faster upon whoever loves me than the flood to its destination.'"

What the Prophet (ﷺ) was trying to impart to the man was that Allah would indeed test his faith by means of his wealth and that he should be prepared for this. In the Quran, Allah tells us: *"Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere"* (Quran, 2:155).

During our lives, we will all vacillate on the spectrum of wealth and poverty. What we need to inculcate in our lives is a condition where we do not lose our faith in Allah in relation to either side of the spectrum. The poor and the wealthy can both become heedless of Allah. In one striking hadith, we hear the Prophet (ﷺ) proclaiming that *"poverty can lead to kufr (disbelief)"* (Musnad Ahmad). This is because poverty can often lead to despair and despair can often lead one to doubting in Allah and questioning His divine decree. What is important is that we remain steadfast in our faith regardless of whether we fall into wealth or poverty. This is what the Prophet (ﷺ) meant when he said *"Wealth does not mean having a lot of property, rather wealth is in being content"* (Al-Bani).

In other words, it is a fact of life that your status, financially and socially, will rise and fall but how you react to it will be a matter for you to decide. This is what Allah will judge you on and this is what will come to define your character in the eyes of others. Try, then, to separate your financial and

social status from your emotional state. This will lead to a healthier outlook on life.

Rumi once remarked that there exists two veils between God and man: health and wealth. He went on to explain that the healthy man remains heedless of God until he experiences pain and suddenly calls out for Him. Similarly, the wealthy man is neglectful of God until he experiences abject poverty.

Islam is not a religion with a natural aversion to money or wealth-building. In fact, there are countless verses in the Quran dealing with financial affairs and admonitions for us to acquire our wealth through lawful and halal means. Islam recognises that money and wealth is an important dimension of one's life. Wealth will affect the quality of your life and the life of those you are responsible towards. Our wealth is also one of the first things we will be judged on as the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us *"The feet of the son of Adam shall not move from before his Lord on the Day of Judgement, until he is asked about five things one of which is his wealth and how he earned it and how he spent it"* (At-Tirmidhi).

The Quran also tells us that those who spend in the way of Allah will not be less off but assures them that they will be enriched by Allah. In Surah al-Baqarah, Allah asks us *"Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned."* (Quran, 2:245). In a hadith qudsi, Allah tells us to *"Spend in charity, O Children of Adam, and I shall spend on you"* (Bukhari).

It is always difficult to part with one's hard-earned wealth, and even more difficult in these times filled with endless causes and charitable organisations, to know where to spend one's wealth. All we can do is purify our intentions and put our trust in Allah. In another hadith qudsi, Allah tells us that those who spend for His sake, will be guaranteed His

love: *"My love is assured for those who love each other for My sake, who sit together for My sake, who visit each other for My sake, and who spend on each other for My sake."* (Musnad Ahmad).

Ultimately, it is our relationship with money that matters above all else. There is a beautiful Sufi parable that captures this perfectly. Once, there was a wealthy merchant making his way through the market. He came across a poor dervish sitting on some dusty steps. He approached him and handed him some money. After surveying the merchant, the dervish said, "I'm not sure if I can take your money".

The merchant was taken aback and replied, "Why not?"

The dervish said, "Do you have more money at home?"

The merchant replied, "Why, yes, of course. I make a good living everyday."

"Are you looking to earn more than what you earn now?" the dervish asked the merchant.

"Yes, of course. A merchant always wishes to earn more," he said with a little haughtiness.

"So", the dervish said, "You have enough wealth and yet you wish for more. I am afraid I cannot take money from a beggar". He returned the money to the merchant who was taken aback.

"You are a strange man, indeed!" exclaimed the merchant.

"Let me explain", said the dervish. "I am wealthy because I am satisfied with whatever Allah provides me with, whether it be a dirham or less or nothing at all. You, on the other hand, are poor because no matter how much you have, you are dissatisfied and are always begging Allah for more."

So, dear reader, give that you may receive. Earn lawfully and reflect over your relationship with money.



Free time before you're occupied

4. Free Time Before You Are Occupied

Our time in the dunya is brief. Each individual life moves forward through time, which is a creation of God. All of our pasts, presents and futures are determined through time. This may seem like an obvious fact, however, we often become blind to the reality that time for us is always running out. An awareness of time moves us into action and it is ultimately our actions during our time here on earth that we will be judged on.

In a well-known hadith, Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ) said, *"Allah Almighty said: The son of Adam abuses me. He curses time and I am time, for in my hand are the night and day."* (Muslim). Time is a blessing from Allah and Allah's creation unfolds through time along with His divine decree. Allah's presence simultaneously flows through, encompasses and transcends time. Wasting time, then, is a devaluation of the entirety of creation in general and one's life more specifically. This is what is meant by the abuse of time. Wasting time during the course of one's life is nothing less than a contempt for life itself.

In one of his poems, Rumi compares our relationship to time like that of a burglar who has broken into a home desperately grabbing at all they can before the inhabitants wake up or return home. The burglar's sense of time running out induces within him a sense of panic, dread and anxiety. The point Rumi is making is that since our time in this life is short, we must steal from it whatever precious moments we can before we are caught by the inevitability of death.

This leaves us with the question: how are we to spend our time wisely?

If we take the Prophet's (ﷺ) life as an example of how we should spend our time, we can see that the guiding principle was striking up a balance between one's spiritual affairs and

one's worldly affairs. He (ﷺ) taught us that for the Muslim, the two go together. The daily life of the believer is punctuated by the five daily prayers, earning an honest living and doing good deeds.

Some of the practical advice the Prophet (ﷺ) gave us was to wake up early. In a narration in At-Tabarani, the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us to, *"Rise up early to earn your living and attend to your affairs, for it brings about blessing and success"*. In another hadith found in Abu Dawud, we find the Prophet (ﷺ) supplicating, *"O Allah, bless my nation's early rising"* (Abu Dawud).

Since time is a given, it must be spent. It is a blessing. Someone once remarked that although we do not possess the power to turn back time, we can wind it up and seize the present moment. Whether we decide upon an action or against it, we are still beholden to the passing of time. Time is the perennial window of opportunity, always inviting us to take advantage of life whilst we are alive and are capable.

Therefore, all of us need to contemplate how we would like to use our time. This requires a serious inventory of how we are currently spending our time. We must remove those things that are harmful to us and orient our lives, on a daily basis, towards the loftiest and highest ideals possible. Organise your life in such a way that it helps you thrive in this life and the next. Our spiritual and worldly salvation is inseparable from time. Once, Fatima (ra), the Prophet's (ﷺ) daughter, was still lying in bed one morning. On seeing this, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) lovingly told her, *"My daughter, get up and witness your Lord's bounty. Do not be among the indifferent; Allah distributes daily bread between the break of dawn and sunrise"* (Al-Baihaqi).

The Sufi's speak about a concept called Ibn-ul-Waqt (The Son of Time). The "Son or person of Time" is conscious of the eternal and as such they are engaged in perpetual

remembrance of God. The "Son of Time" is someone characterised by their presence of mind, giving their full attention to the present moment. They live in the "Now" with little regard for past or for the future, for they recognise that both past and future are out of their control. The present moment is one where one can, through the grace of Allah, act.

This does not mean that one should not plan one's time. It means that time spent on any activity should be quality time. Imam Ghazali tells us in his *Bidayat al-Hidaya*, "Your time is your life; your life is your capital through which you spiritually transact with Allah. This is how you reach eternal bliss in nearness to God. Every breath you take is like an irreplaceable priceless jewel. Once it passes, it can never be retrieved." Al-Ghazali was no doubt an Ibn-ul-Waqt who dedicated his time to worship and knowledge, which we all benefit from today.

A person is their most authentic self when they are in the present moment, free from thoughts or regrets of the past or worries and anxieties about the future. This is time wasted. This is a helpful concept to practice in one's life since Ibn-ul-Waqt is someone who is present in the moment. They are aware of themselves and in that present moment, they strive to exercise a meaningful relationship with others and their dealings with the world. One can become trapped between regrets of the past and the anxieties of the future.

Suhayb Ar-Rumi (ra) reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: *"How wondrous is this life for the believer. Indeed, all of his affairs are good for him. This is an exception for the believer alone. If something good happens to him, he shows gratitude and this benefits him. And if a calamity befalls him, he patiently bears it, and this is beneficial to him"* (Muslim).

So much of our time can be wasted on overthinking things but not acting. This is often the case with people who suffer

with anxiety or depression because they are tethered to their negative thinking patterns. The Sufi concept of being the "offspring of time" teaches us to detach ourselves from the past and the future in negative ways and live positively and productively in the present moment. The person of time does not let the passing of their years fill them with a sense of sadness but rather they resign themselves to time in the same way they resign themselves to God since both are one and the same thing.

Imam Shafi used to tell his students that time was like a sword; one either cut it or one was cut by it. What he meant was that we needed to wield the sword of time to our advantage by planning and orienting our daily lives towards righteousness. Ali ibn Abi Talib (ra) once said that there are only really two days in the life of all human beings: good days and bad days. When one has a good day, one should not be proud or become complacent. When it is a bad day, one should exercise the virtue of patience. Either way, both days are a test for you.

The Quran clearly outlines how we should spend our time, when it swears by Time itself, in the beautiful Surah Al-'Asr.

In the Name of Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful

By (the Token of) Time (through the ages),

Except such as have Faith,

and do righteous deeds,

and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth,

and of Patience and Constancy.

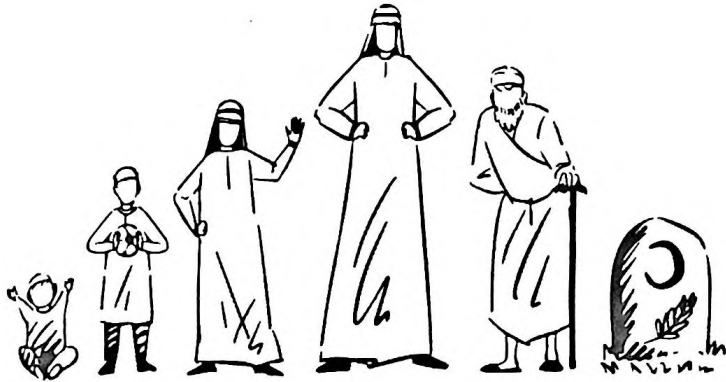
- (Quran, 103: 1-3).

What is striking about this surah is its brevity, which reflects the brevity of our individual lives, while encapsulating profound truths regarding man's relationship with time. The first thing we as Muslims must do is keep faith in God. For our

“faith” in Him will imbue our time on earth with meaning and purpose, which will guide us towards “righteous deeds”. Allah clearly outlines this purpose by providing us with a moral and practical framework by which we should judge ourselves, namely, that whatever we do, it should be righteous, truthful and that we should bear our circumstances with patience.

Whatever ambitions and goals you may have in life, clearly visualize them and measure it against the moral yardstick articulated in surah Al-‘Asr. Ibn Qayyim used to tell his students that wasting time was worse than death. This was because death separated one from this world and therefore from time itself. However, wasting one’s time while alive separated one from Allah.

May Allah protect us from wasting time.



Life before death

5. Life Before Your Death

One of the most difficult things we will have to confront as human beings is our own mortality. We are endowed with the capacity to contemplate and reflect on the concept and reality of death. As far as we know, this is a distinctly unique trait we have as a human species and we do not really know whether nonhuman animals are conscious of their own death in the same way.

We tend to hide away from the spectacle of death even though it is a phenomenon that occurs every single day. We will all experience the death of a loved one. Reflect on this sentence: *everyone you know including yourself will one day die*. Your first encounter with death will be an extremely jarring experience. However, once the grief has subsided, death will offer up the greatest lessons you will ever learn and will become your greatest teacher.

This can only be the case if you allow it to. Many people are consumed by grief. The idea of being forever separated from a loved one in this life is simply too much to bear. Others are psychologically paralysed by an acute death anxiety. This often occurs when another's demise brings the inevitability of one's own death into sharp focus.

Death anxiety is also common as one advances in age. The renowned existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom writes that the more regrets one has in life, the stronger one's death anxiety tends to be. Thus, we should all consciously strive to live fulfilled lives. In practice, this means to find meaningful work, attending to our obligations and nurturing bonds of love and affection.

In many societies today, there is a fixation with youth and an aversion towards old age. The noble approach of old age is eclipsed by the noisy fanfare of youthfulness. We even tend to

put our elderly into care homes where they spend the remainder of their senile lives, invisible to the rest of society. As a society, we blot out any reminder of old age and death because it reminds us of our own mortality. It is estimated that the global anti-aging market is now worth 58.5 billion dollars, shedding a stark light on our unhealthy relationship with the aging process. After all, who wants to look into the mirror and be reminded of death?

There is a Sufi tale about a king who ruled a vast empire and was quite contented with himself. One night, while the king was sleeping, a large and towering figure came to him in a dream. The figure was dressed in black flowing robes and was faceless. Terrified, the king asked the figure, "Who are you?"

"I am Death", replied the figure, "I have been sent to collect your soul at sunset in such and such a place. So, be prepared to meet me there".

The king was so frightened that he jolted out from his dream in a cold sweat. When he awoke, all he could remember was the appointed time that Death said it would come to get him but could not remember the place. He tried and tried to remember but he simply could not recall the place where Death said he would meet the king.

Now, the panic-stricken king summoned all the kingdom's renowned soothsayers, saints and pious men before him. He told them about his dream and that the angel of death had told him that he would come to collect him at sunset but that he could not remember the place. He pleaded with them to come up with a solution so that he could be spared this meeting and avoid the place altogether.

All the saints, soothsayers and pious of the kingdom thought long and hard about what the king could do but they failed to find a solution. However, in the gathering there was a slave boy who raised his hand and said, "Your majesty, I am but

a lowly slave boy but if you would like to hear my suggestion it is this: that you should ride your horse, which is the fastest horse in the kingdom, as far away from your kingdom as possible. In this way, you will avoid your meeting with Death”.

This suggestion seemed to be the most reasonable to the king and so he demanded that his steed be prepared. He mounted the steed along with a few meagre provisions and darted out of his palace.

The king rode his horse as fast as he could and for as long as he could until he reached a neighbouring kingdom. There he was met by another king to whom he explained his dilemma. The king welcomed him and said he was permitted to take refuge in his kingdom from Death.

Relieved, the king patted his horse, which had been so reliable. His loyal horse had not stopped even once nor slowed its pace throughout their journey. He vowed that he would honour his noble steed as soon as he returned to his kingdom with a huge parade and a new stable filled with all the comforts a horse could possibly wish for. As the king was thinking about such things, he felt a cold hand upon his shoulder. He turned around to see the angel of death who now pulled him forward by his regal robe.

The king cried out, “But how can this be? O Death, I rode my horse as far away as was possible!”

“I was thinking exactly the same thing”, replied death. “When Allah had sent me to you, He told me that I should collect you from the neighbouring kingdom at sunset and I thought to myself how on earth will the king make it to the neighbouring kingdom so quickly by sunset but I see that I have your noble horse to thank for that”. And, with that, the king’s soul was taken.

We are all like this king. Many of us are on the run from

death or wish to delay it. We fail to recognise that it is something out of our control. Allah says in the Quran: "*But never will Allah delay a soul when its time has come. And Allah is Acquainted with what you do.*" (Quran, 63:11). Instead of spending the precious last moments with his loved ones, the king decided to go on the run. It would have been more dignified if he had submitted. As believers, we must use life as a preparation for death so that when we are finally called, we submit gracefully.

We are in constant denial of death and many of us only come to terms with it when we are forced to. This can be either when we are faced with our own death or through the experience of losing a loved one. Each of us will experience both events.

In 1969, the famous psychologist Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross expounded upon the emotional states humans felt when approaching their own death. In her seminal book *On Death and Dying*, Kubler-Ross studied the experience of dying through interviews with terminally ill patients. She famously concluded there were Five Stages of Dying: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. She also found that there was a universality to these emotional states and they seemed to occur during other profound moments of our lives such as grief and other major life changes, such as becoming physically disabled or from the loss of a job.

Death is imbued with a terrifying mystery. As mentioned earlier, our fear of death as humans is pretty uniform. Some fear the actual event of their own death, others the death of a loved one while others express death anxiety over the notion that they simply did not achieve everything they could have while alive.

The Prophet (ﷺ) asked us to view death in a different way. Once, he told the Companions that most people are asleep and that it was only when they died that they truly became awake. It was only when contemplating the reality of one's death that one truly appreciated life. Many of us operate in the world in

autopilot mode, engaging in the same repetitive tasks. The challenge for the believer is to practise awareness. There is nothing like the thought of death to remind us about the fleeting nature of this life and, more importantly, our place in it. An awareness of death, propels us to act in the world and it is only when we are engaged in virtuous action that we are truly living in the world.

The Quran informs us that the death of every individual will be one where such emotions are brought into sharp focus, Allah says, *"And the intoxication of death will bring the truth; that is what you were trying to avoid."* (Quran, 50:19). The point of your physical death will be the summation of your life. This is important for us as believers to remember. As well as death being a door way to everlasting life, it is also the door way to our final judgement. Death, then, is the end of our journey in this life but is only the beginning of our accountability, as Allah makes clear in the Quran, *"Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection..."* (Quran, 3:185).

Some of us may have developed an unhealthy relationship with death. Some of us may long for it because we are dissatisfied with life or because we are depressed or because we have experienced a tragic life event, which has turned our world upside down. It is difficult to see the bigger picture when we are going through our own pain and oftentimes it feels like we are the only one suffering.

At such times we can feel an acute aversion to life and feel severely demotivated. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"None of you should wish for death because of a calamity befalling them; but if you wish for death, you should say: 'O Allah! Keep me alive for as long as life is better for me, and let me die if death is better for me'"* (Bukhari). This hadith teaches us that what matters most is submitting to the will of Allah in the direst moments of our

lives. As long as we are alive, we have the opportunity to do whatever is within our means to make our lives and the lives of those around us just that little bit better. The longer the life, the more opportunity to do good in the world.

Some of us suffering from depression or other forms of mental anguish will at times long for death. It is a cry to escape from the painful trials and tribulations of the world. Life is not easy; and some of us have more difficult lives than others. However, we are told that if Allah wishes good for someone, He tests them. We are also told in the Quran that our trials are extremely specific to us. We should refrain from comparing our miseries and recognise that things could always be worse than they are. We should also be aware of the well-known Quranic verse: *"Allah does not burden a soul beyond that which it can bear..."* (Qur'an, 2:286).

The Prophet (ﷺ) said *"The gift to a believer is death"* (At-Tirmidhi). As believers, our relationship with death needs to be a healthy one. Our faith should be a source of comfort in the face of death. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed us that although it is natural to fear death, there is also a sense of joy that accompanies it since the believer will finally get to meet their Maker. Could there be any better gift than this?

There is a deep irony at the heart of death. Death is the reason why we treasure life so deeply and because we treasure life so deeply, we fear death intensely. Rather than letting death paralyze you with fear, let it be that thing which will shock you out of your heedless lethargy. This is to say that you should not let death lead you to despair. The reality of death should affect your day-to-day life in such a way that you waste no time in carrying out good deeds and fulfilling your ambitions and obligations. Our reactions to the things that stop us living complete and fulfilled lives should be beaten away by the reality that we will all end up in the graveyard of humanity. So, let the reality of your own death refine your resolve while you are still alive.

The awareness of death in Islam serves a simple purpose: it is to make us discerning. In reminding ourselves of death, we are reminded of the finitude of our existence. The currency of life is time and we must spend it in the service of Allah by doing good deeds and making the right choices. We should use the time we have while alive to live a life full of meaning. We should continuously show kindness and affection towards those whom we love with the knowledge that we will one day be separated from them. Life is brief, so make it a brief moment of love.

The analogy of a life lived well is like a tree that has been tended to. After the tree comes of age, the birds derive benefit from it, as do travellers who seek relief in its shade on a hot summer's day. The Prophet (ﷺ) said that *"When a man dies, his good deeds come to an end, except three: Ongoing charity, beneficial knowledge, and a righteous son who will pray for him"* (Muslim). Here, we see that one's life and presence is extended through the seeds of charity planted while alive. Always remember that all your good deeds will outlive you. Just as bad deeds will be a source of anguish in the hereafter, good deeds will come one's aid in the afterlife. Using the virtue of charity as an example, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Indeed, charity extinguishes the Lord's anger and protects against a horrible death."* (At-Tirmidhi).

It is difficult for us as human beings making our way through a world filled with infinite distractions to remember death. The word for mankind in Arabic is *insaan*, which etymologically can be traced back to the meaning "to be forgetful". It is even more difficult for us to take death as a principle which regulates the actions and decisions in our lives when we continue to pay it little heed. It is difficult to be in the world and not to form strong attachments to it. This is why the Prophet (ﷺ) encouraged us to visit graveyards.

'Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (ra) reported that Prophet (ﷺ) said *"I prohibited you from visiting graves, but visit them now. Verily, they will weaken your attachment to the world and remind you of the Hereafter."* (Ibn Majah). Attachment to the world can easily take hold of anyone of us so take heed of the advice of the Prophet (ﷺ) when he said, *"Remember often the destroyer of all pleasures (i.e., death)."* (At-Tirmidhi).

One of the greatest wonders in the world will always be that although we see people dying all around us, we do not think that it will happen to us soon, or it seems to be something that will occur in the far reaches of distant time. Thus, we reason with ourselves that we need not worry or think about it, burying it away in the back of our minds.

When the Prophet (ﷺ) advises us to take advantage of our life before our death, he means that we live to the fullest before we die and the only way we can live life courageously is by reminding ourselves that our time on this earth is so very brief. The courage we acquire comes from an individual reconciliation with the reality of our death. This is why the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, *"Die before you die"*. Remembrance of death is meant to ennoble our existence, not reduce us into a state of existential despair. Ibn Umar (ra) reported that a man once came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked him, "O Messenger of Allah, which of the believers is the best?" The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Those with the best character"*. The man said, "Which of the believers is the wisest?" The Prophet (ﷺ) answered, *"Those who remember death often and have best prepared for it with good deeds; those are the wisest"* (Ibn Majah).

In the end, death for the believer is a door to the anticipated meeting with Allah. In Islam, it is a misnomer to refer to death as the end of one's life, rather we should refer to it as "The Return", as it is so often referred to in the Quran.

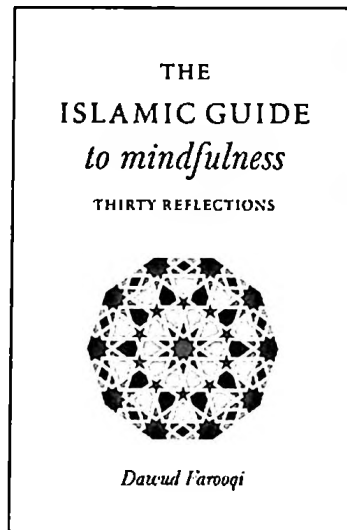
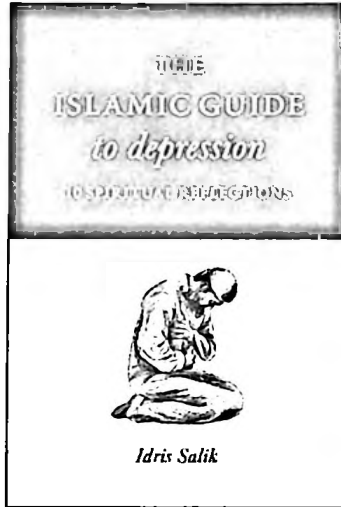
And what a beautiful return it shall be when your Maker welcomes you back home with these words:

*O Soul, that art at rest,
Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing,
So enter among My servants,
And enter My Garden. - (Quran, 89:27-30)*

Until that time, let us try to imbue our lives with the sunnah of our beloved Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him.

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